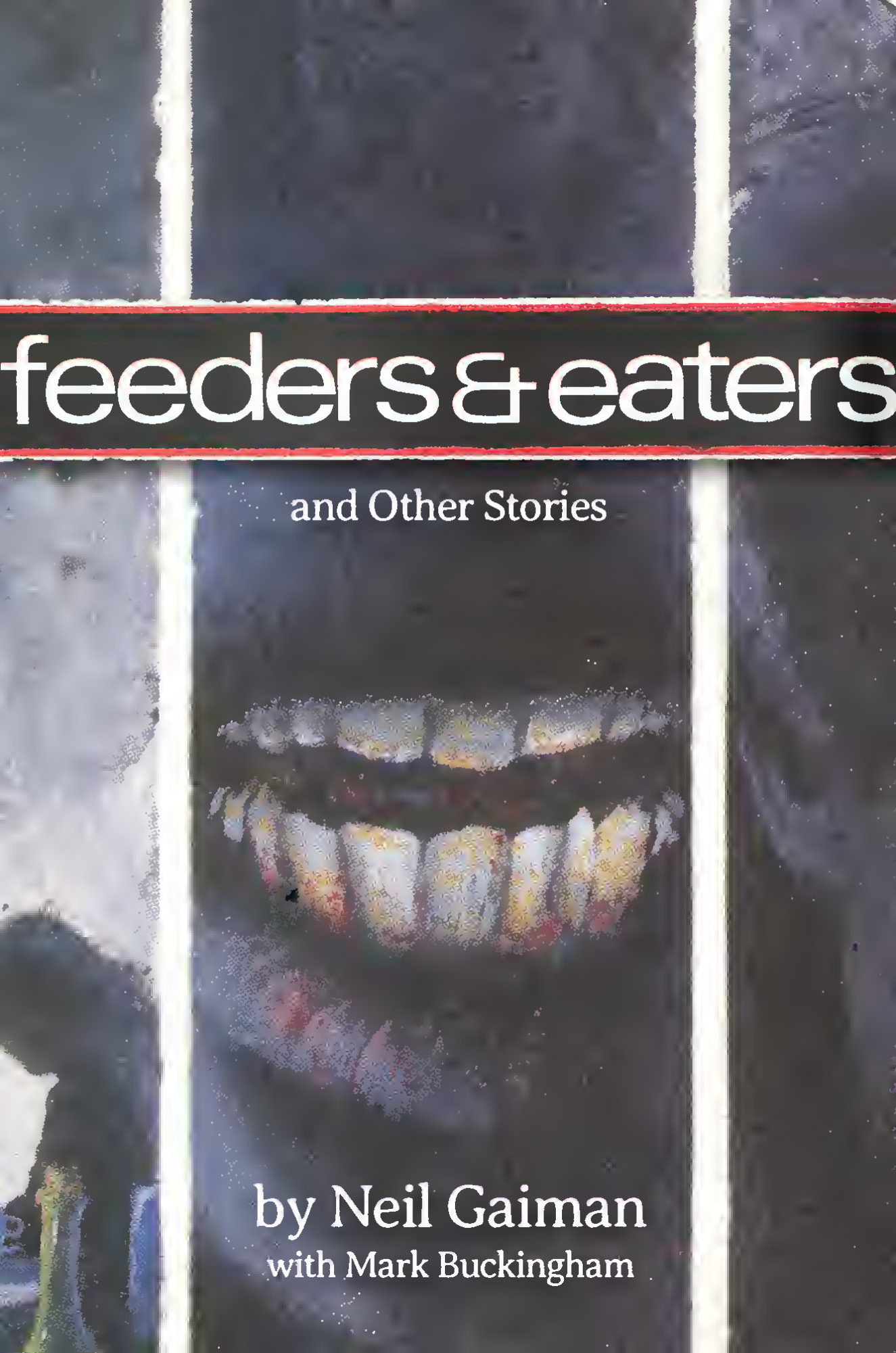
feeders & eaters

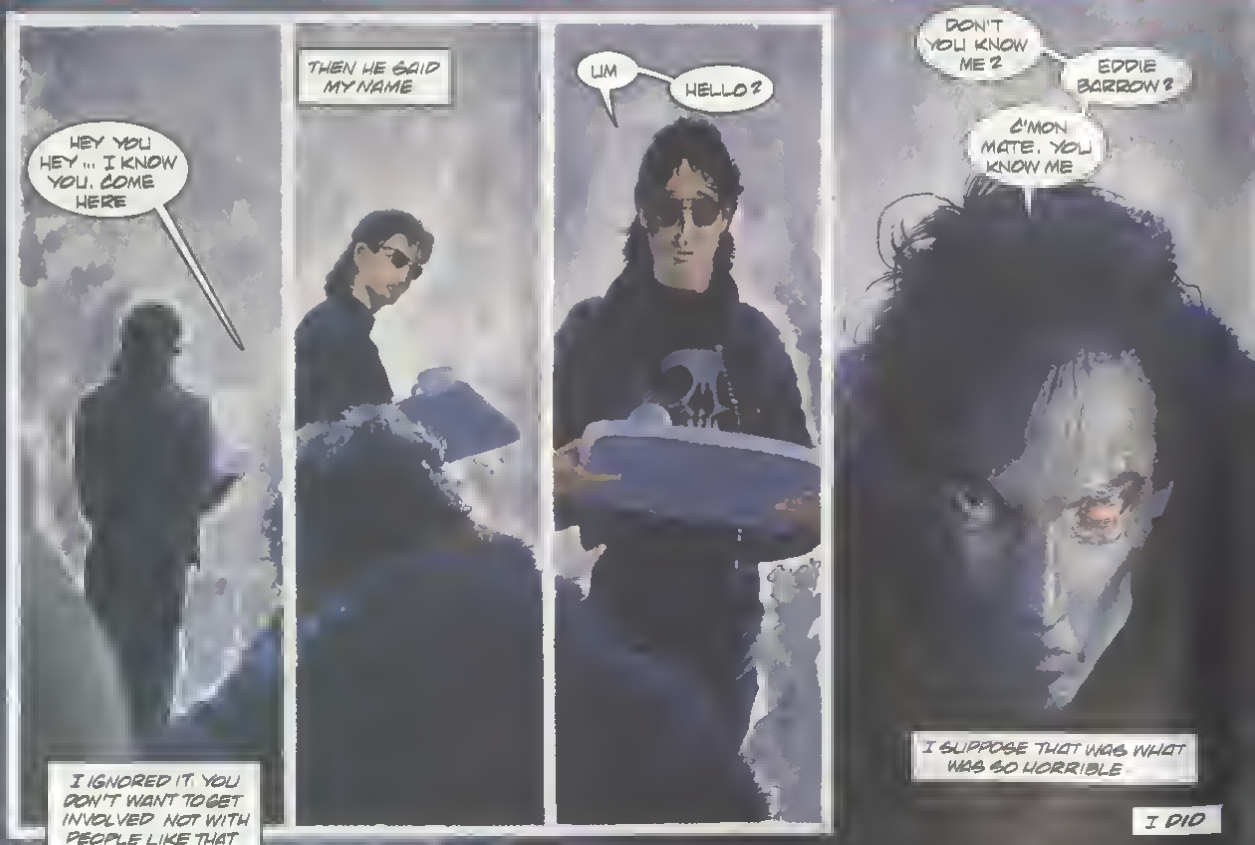
and Other Stories



by Neil Gaiman

with Mark Buckingham

feeders & eaters



WE'D WORKED ON A BUILDING SITE TOGETHER, TEN YEARS BACK, DURING MY ONE AND ONLY REAL FLIRTATION WITH MANUAL WORK.
HE LEFT THE FORCE AFTER SOME TROUBLE BETWEEN HIM AND ONE OF THE TOP BRASS. HE SAID IT WAS THE SUPERINTENDENT'S WIFE MADE HIM LEAVE
EDDIE WAS ALWAYS GETTING INTO TROUBLE WITH WOMEN
THEY REALLY LIKED HIM. WOMEN
EDDIE BARROW WAS EX-POLICE. SOMETIMES HE'D TELL ME TRUE STORIES. TALES OF FITTING UP AND DOING OVER. OF PUNISHMENT AND CRIME.
WHEN WE WERE WORKING TOGETHER ON THE SITE THEY'D JUST HUNT HIM DOWN, GIVE HIM SANDWICHES, LITTLE PRESENTS, WHATEVER. HE NEVER SEEMED TO DO ANYTHING TO MAKE THEM LIKE HIM.
THEY JUST LIKED HIM.
I USED TO WATCH HIM TO SEE HOW HE DID IT.
BIG
STRONG
NOT VERY BRIGHT
BUT IT DIDN'T SEEM TO BE ANYTHING HE DID. EVENTUALLY I DECIDED IT WAS JUST THE WAY HE WAS.
AND TERRIBLY, TERRIBLY GOOD LOOKING
EDDIE? WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?
WOW-HOW JAH MEAN? HAPPENED?
YOU LOOK DREADFUL
YEAH?
MM-HM.
HAPPENS TO US ALL

I SIPPED MY TEA. I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING, AND MAYBE HE THOUGHT I WANTED TO KNOW MORE, THAT I CARED.
TO BE HONEST, I HAD ENOUGH PROBLEMS OF MY OWN. I DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT HIS PROBLEMS WITH WHATEVER-IT-WAS: DRINK, OR DRUGS, OR DISEASE
OR MADNESS.
BUT HE STARTED TALKING IN THIS FLAT GREY VOICE AND...
I LISTENED
I CAME HERE A FEW YEARS BACK. CAME DOWN WHEN THEY WERE BUILDING THE BY-PASS. STUCK AROUND.
GOT A ROOM IN AN OLD PLACE ROUND THE BACK OF PRINCE REGENT STREET. GOT A ROOM IN THE ATTIC.
"IT WAS A FAMILY HOUSE, REALLY. THERE WAS THE FAMILY, AND THERE WERE TWO BOARDERS.
"ME AND MISS CORVIER.
"WE WERE UP IN THE ATTIC IN SEPARATE
"SHE NEVER CAME DOWN FOR MEALS SO IT WAS A WEEK BEFORE WE MET.
"SHE WAS COMING OUT OF THE LAVVY.
"SHE WAS OLD, SO OLD..."
I ALWAYS HAD MY MEALS WITH THE FAMILY.
IT'S FUNNY WITH OLD PEOPLE, YOU DON'T THINK THEY FEEL THINGS LIKE WE DO. I MEAN, HERE'S HER, OLD ENOUGH TO BE ME GRAN. AND...
ANYWAY

"I CAME UP TO ME ROOM ONE NIGHT, AND THERE'S THIS BAG OF MUSHROOMS IT WAS, LIKE, A PRESENT. I KNEW THAT STRAIGHT OFF.
"FOR ME.
"NOT NORMAL MUSHROOMS, THOUGH. I KNOCKED ON UER DOOR."
ER ARE THESE FOR ME?
PICKED THEM MYSELF, MISTER BARROW.
THEY AREN'T, LIKE, TOADSTOOLS OR ANYTHING?
OOH, THEY'RE ALL RIGHT FOR EATING THEY'RE FINE FOR EATING SHAGGY INK-CAPS, THEY ARE
EAT THEM SOON, NOW. THEY'RE BEST FRIED UP WITH A LITTLE BUTTER AND GARLIC.
I USED TO EAT A LOT OF MUSHROOMS BUT I CAN'T ANY MORE. WHAT WITH MY STOMACH.
BUT YOU CAN EAT THEM?
OF COURSE IT'S ASTONISHING THE THINGS PEOPLE DON'T EAT.
ALL THIS STUFF AROUND PEOPLE COULD EAT, IF ONLY THEY KNEW IT.
"I WENT BACK INTO MY ROOM, THE OTHER HALF OF THE ATTIC.
"THEY'D DONE THE CONVERSION A FEW YEARS BACK.
"AFTER A FEW DAYS THE MUSHROOMS DISSOLVED INTO BLACK STUFF, LIKE INK, AND I HAD TO PUT THE WHOLE MESS INTO A PLASTIC BAG AND THROW IT AWAY."

HULLO MISTER B
HELLO MISS CORVIER
CALL ME EFFIE.
RIGHT MISS CORVIER
HOW WERE THE MUSHROOMS ?
VERY NICE. THANK YOU, LOVELY
"SHE'D LEAVE ME OTHER THINGS. LITTLE PRESENTS, AND THEN I DIDN'T SEE HER FOR A WHILE."
I WAS AT DINNER WITH THE FAMILY, THE LAD AT THE POLY, HE'D GONE BACK TO HIS FAMILY FOR THE HOLIDAYS
IT WAS SUMMER, AND REALLY HOT.
AND SOMEONE SAID, THEY HADN'T SEEN HER FOR ABOUT A WEEK AND MAYBE I COULD LOOK IN ON HER

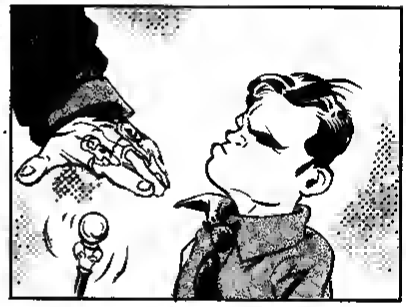
"SO I DID.
"SHE WAS IN THE BED, SHE WASN'T WELL SHE HAD ALL THESE SHEETS AROUND HER AND SHE SAID,
EDWARD? I DON'T WANT TO BE A BURDEN ON ANYONE, BUT I'M SO HUNGRY.
I'LL GET YOU SOMETHING TO EAT, THEN.
MEAT. IT MUST BE FRESH MEAT AND RAW. I WON'T LET ANYONE ELSE COOK IT FOR ME. MEAT PLEASE. EDWARD
RAW.
NO PROBLEM.

"I THOUGHT ABOUT NICKING IT FROM THE CAT'S BOWL BUT I DIDN'T
CAT
" I WENT DOWN TO THE BUTCHERS AND GOT HER HALF A POUND OF BEST SIRLOIN. "
GET DOWN. IT'S NOT FOR YOU, PUSS IT'S FOR MISS CORVIER. SHE'S NOT VERY WELL, AND SHE'S GOING TO COOK IT FOR HER DINNER
THANK YOU, EDWARD. YOU'VE GOT A GOOD HEART.
SHE WAS UP AND ABOUT AGAIN SOON AFTER THAT SHE WAS FINE
" AND THEN THOMPSON WENT MISSING... "
THOMPSON?
HE LOOKED UP THEN, AS IF HE'D FORGOTTEN I WAS THERE AND HE SAID
THE CAT.
I WAS NEVER MUCH OF A ONE FOR CATS. NOT REALLY DOGS I LIKED. BIG FAITHFUL THINGS.
DO ANYTHING FOR YOU, A DOG WILL.
NOT CATS GO OFF FOR DAYS, YOU DON'T SEE THEM..
WHEN I WAS A LAD, WE HAD A CAT IT WAS CALLED GINGER TURNED OUT THERE WERE SOME PEOPLE A FEW ROADS OVER WHO HAD A CAT THEY CALLED MARMALADE
SAME CAT.
GETTING FED BY ALL OF US..
SNEAKY LITTLE BASTARDS.
YOU CAN'T TRUST THEM
SO I DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING WHEN THOMPSON WENT AWAY.
THE FAMILY WERE WORRIED. NOT ME I KNEW IT'D COME BACK

" AND A FEW NIGHTS LATER, I HEARD IT.
"I WAS TRYING TO SLEEP, AND IT WAS-- IT WAS REALLY QUIET, LIKE, MEWING.
" BUT WHEN YOU CAN'T SLEEP THESE THINGS GET ON YOUR NERVES.
" I THOUGHT MAYBE IT WAS STUCK UP IN THE RAFTERS OR OUT ON THE ROOF.
" SO I WENT LOOKING.
" IT WAS COMING FROM MIGS CORVIER'S ROOM-- THE OTHER HALF OF THE ATTIC. I KNOCKED, BUT NO-ONE ANSWERED.
" THE DOOR WASN'T LOCKED, SO I WENT IN. I THOUGHT MAYBE THE CAT WAS STUCK SOMEWHERE OR [illegible] OR SOMETHING. I DON'T KNOW.
" WHATEVER."
Mrlin.
Mrle...

YOU KILLED HIM
HE WAS ALL THAT I HAD TO KEEP ME GOING AND YOU KILLED HIM HE WAS MY FRESH MEAT
IF YOU KNOW HOW, YOU CAN MAKE THEM NOT DIE. SO THE MEAT STAYS FRESH. SO THE LIFE STAYS IN IT...
AND I NEED MY MEAT I NEED THE LIFE
YOU KILLED MY FRESH MEAT.
I'M AN OLD WOMAN
I-.I DON'T EVER WANT TO BE A B-BURDEN ON ANYBODY.
N-NOT EVER
NOW WHO'S GOING TO FEED ME...?
TAP
TAP
I..
THAT MEANS I HAVE TO GO NOW

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED LIKE I SAID BEFORE. IT'S A TRUE STORY, PRETTY MUCH
IT REALLY HAPPENED
ON THE TRAIN HOME I ENCOUNTERED A WOMAN CARRYING A BABY
IT WAS FLOATING IN FORMALDEHYDE, IN A HEAVY GLASS CONTAINER
SHE NEEDED TO SELL IT, AND WE TALKED FOR A WHILE, ABOUT HER REASONS, AND ABOUT OTHER THINGS
BUT IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO SPEAK FURTHER OF THAT HERE



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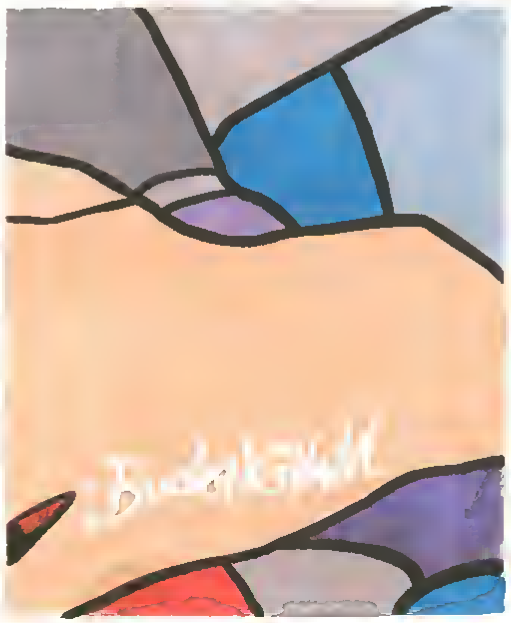
Mark Buckingham '93